

## Unrepaired Cleft Palate: Helping Your Child Learn to Eat Strained and Solid Food

**Whenever you give your child a new food or drink, he or she will need time to learn how to suck or swallow it. Be patient.**



Offer breast milk or formula in the bottle until your infant is 12 months old. You may also be able to breastfeed. Ask your health care provider for help and advice.

Begin offering a drinking or sippy cup at age 6-7 months. This helps with lip closure.

In general, 4-6 months is a good age to introduce solids. But each child is different. You may need to wait until your child is a bit older.

Feed your infant solids using a spoon, which helps with lip closure. Introduce foods one at a time. Wait four days before introducing a new food.

Your child may choke or gag during feeding, so try not to overfill the spoon with food, feed too fast or serve sticky or hard foods. Stay away from peanut butter, melted cheese, sticky noodles, hard and crunchy foods, and tough meats.

Offer tiny bites to get your child's interest and to help him learn where to put his tongue. Let him taste and play with the food in his mouth. Be patient; it takes time for your infant to know what to do with the food.

Always keep an eye on your child when she is drinking or eating in case of choking.

An infant with unrepaired cleft palate may need softer foods. To make cereal, fruits and vegetables softer, mix them with additional formula.

If food comes through your child's nose, try not to worry. Give her smaller spoonfuls and place the food at the front of her mouth. Always wait until your child swallows one mouthful completely before offering another spoonful. Sitting your child upright to eat and drink also helps. Eventually your child will learn how to push the food in her mouth so she can swallow.

Oranges, lemons, other citrus fruits, tomatoes and spicy foods can cause soreness in the open cleft. So go slowly with these foods.

If food remains in the cleft palate after feeding, rinse the cleft and mouth with water.

## Guide for Starting Foods

Consult your physician before starting solid foods.

### 4-6 Months

Iron-fortified, single grain infant cereal

### 6-7 Months

Strained fruits and vegetables, one new fruit or vegetable at a time

### 7-9 Months

Other infant cereals

Mashed fruits and vegetables

Cottage cheese and egg yolk

Fruit juice like apple, grape, or pear, (diluted, unsweetened, limit to 4 ounces per day)

Strained or finely chopped meats and poultry



### 10-12 Months

Increase finger foods like toast squares, well-cooked vegetables, peeled soft fruit, and small tender pieces of meat.

Add other soft foods such as cheese, pasta, and casseroles.

Try fish, but check carefully for bones.

### AVOID THESE FOODS: CHOKING HAZARD

Hot dogs, corn dogs, and other link-type meats, unless they have no skin and are cut into small pieces.

Whole grapes, cherries and other small round fruit, unless cut up

Popcorn

Potato chips, corn chips and other snack chips

Raw vegetables and hard fresh fruits such as apple slices

Nuts and seeds

Hard candies, suckers on a stick

Hard cookies, hard crackers (like wheat thins or rye crisp) and hard cereals like granola or Grape Nuts)

### Web Resources:

<http://www.clapa.com>

<http://www.marchofdimes.com>



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